Connecting Learners, Educational Institutions, and Industry

Project Plan

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WIL Academy Project Plan

Abstract
WIL Academy is an innovative Work Integrated Learning (WIL)\(^1\) model designed to connect educational institutions, industry and learners to develop effective programs aimed to fill local skills gaps in STEM, Health and IT fields. The program is aimed at adult learners who have been out of workforce for some time. Through partnerships with local employers, students receive up to 50% of their educational experience in the workplace. The other 50% will be delivered through a competency-based adaptive learning structure at the host college. Learning technologies such as ePortfolios, adaptive learning systems, and online learning resources are important enabling components. WIL Academy will develop effective models of collaboration to deliver relevant programs that address the growing skills gaps in the economy, and help career-interrupted learners with valuable pre-existing skills get back into the workforce.

Objectives/Deliverables and Project Charter

Purpose and Goals
The WIL Academy project aims to develop a new pedagogical model that integrates competency-based education, adaptive learning, and situated cognition in a work-integrated learning (WIL) approach, enabled by the use of cutting-edge technology and aimed at adult learners. It forges close partnerships between educational institutions and local industries to design and deliver programs in STEM, Health and IT fields.

Justification and Significance
At a time when there is significant skills shortage in many key areas of the economy, it is imperative that people who have had a break in their career are effectively supported in re-entering the workforce, even if they change their field of expertise (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013). These learners often have significant career skills, and mainly lack the confidence and discipline knowledge required for new local areas of employment. Employers report that graduates often enter the workforce with the wrong skills and blame higher education for not doing its job in educating the workforce of the future (Mourshed, Farrell & Barton, 2012; Korn, 2013). They mainly refer not to discipline knowledge, but to graduate skills, including at the metacognitive level (Brett, 2013).

Problem
WIL Academy is designed to address the following economic and higher education problems:
- Skills shortage in localized STEM, Health and IT middle-skill jobs (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2013)
- Misalignment between postsecondary preparation and industry needs (Carnevale, Jayasundara, & Hanson, 2012)
- Difficulty of people who have had career breaks to re-enter the workforce (Krouse, 2013)
- High costs to students engaged in higher education

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\(^1\) Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is “an umbrella term used for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum.” (Patrick et al. 2008, p. iv)
Programmatic Components

Learning: This model will be delivered through a curriculum emphasizing both discipline-focused and career-relevant skills. Learning will be divided between an academic and workplace environment to allow students to gain deeper learning, practical job competencies, and situated cognition. The competency-based approach to learning measures learning rather than time. Students work at their own pace and advance by demonstrating that they have mastered the competencies. Adaptive learning employs technology and leverages student data to continually customize and individualize the curriculum to meet individual students’ needs (Fain, 2013; Langmead, 2013; Walsh, 2011). Situated cognition contends that knowledge is situated in the activity or context in which it is developed and used (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989). WIL Academy combines these three concepts to create an unparalleled, synergistic and contextualized experience for students to learn and master workplace competencies quickly, effectively and inexpensively. Skills, knowledge and progress are documented in ePortfolios, enabling access during coursework and post-graduation.

Technology: Technology plays a significant role, with the use of Open Education Resources (including MOOCs), ePortfolios, peer to peer support systems and learning analytics. The use of ePortfolios within a framework of competency-based learning ensures prior learning and skills are recognized, and that learners can progress at an individual level while developing valuable metacognitive skills through reflective learning (O’Keeffe and Donnelly, 2013). Delivery of content via adaptive learning technology and the use of social media to connect learners with each others also play an important role.

Student Support: Faculty will serve as academic advisors for students. Student success coaches will provide high-touch support to address academic and non-academic barriers to help students effectively move through the program. Student peer mentors will guide and support through the educational experience, whilst gaining valuable mentoring experience and expertise.

Affordability: Student tuition for this associate degree program will be $3,000 per year for a total of two years. Federal and state financial aid will cover the majority of the tuition. Industry partners will cover 25% of student tuition, as student workplace learning will also serve the work needs of employers. Competency-based instruction and adaptive learning can shorten time to degree, reducing overall cost. Curriculum will rely on open educational resources (OER) and other online resources to reduce student costs. Partnerships with the host university and industry partners allow WIL Academy to keep overhead costs down and tuition affordable. The peer mentor model reduces a need for additional staffing to support students. Industry partners will help develop and deliver the curriculum, reducing the need for excess faculty.

Franchise Model: WIL Academy will launch with one initial location, but plans to expand to additional locations through a franchise model. Any college in areas with significant local skills gaps could become a franchisee and implement the model. Although the model focuses on economic and postsecondary problems in the United States, its has global implications and could be suitable for an international market with some adjustments.

Activities out of Scope
This model will serve as a degree program within an accredited host institution. The WIL Academy will not become its own separate accredited institution, as the model is predicated on
close partnership with a university and a set of industry partners. WIL Academy will only focus on undergraduate programs. It will not provide for housing, student affairs, or related services.

**Objectives and Outcomes**

WIL Academy will be guided by the following objectives:

- Reduce the skills gaps in a local area and meet local employer needs
- Forge a new type of lasting partnership between higher education and industry, thus significantly improving the relevance of graduate outcomes and career skills
- Establish Work Integrated Learning as a new core model of higher education based on competency-based education, adaptive learning, and situated cognition, and enhanced by the use of cutting-edge technology
- Enable career-interrupted adult learners to re-enter the workforce in areas of high skills needs
- Build affordability for students and sustainability of structure

Successful delivery of WIL Academy programs will result in the following target outcomes:

- Student satisfaction rate of 90 percent every semester
- Employer satisfaction rate of 90 percent every semester
- Degree completion rate of 70 percent for the first cohort
- Employment rate of 75 percent for the first cohort
- Employment continuation rate of at least one year
- Enrollment rate to increase by 100 percent following the first cohort
- Franchise satisfaction rate of 90 percent every semester

**Ownership**

WIL Academy will be established as an independent corporation with a leadership team and advisory board. The advisory board will be comprised of industry and higher education members. The board will shape and inform the planning, development and launch of the model.

**Partners**

The success of this venture depends on participation of its key partners - a host university and industry partners. WIL Academy will partner with a university, which hosts the academy, takes the academy under its accreditation, and provides administrative and overhead support to achieve efficiencies of scale in operations. This model benefits the university by providing a “turn-key” solution to a problem, assisting the university in targeting a segment of adult learners that it likely has not effectively served in the past, and helping the university directly connect to its local economy.

Industry partners will come from STEM, health, and IT fields. Partners will vary based on the region’s identified skills gaps. Industry partners benefit from gaining trained employees to help them meet middle-skill job gaps. By serving as a co-creator of the curriculum and co-guide of the learning experience, industry partners can ensure that these students, who will potentially become their future employees, will be properly trained to meet the current needs of the industry.
**Timeframe**
Planning to launch the academy will be a 1.5 year process, broken into four phases:
- **Phase 1** - Conceptual Planning: identify a location, host institution, industry partners, staff, and advisory board
- **Phase 2** - Implementation: formalize partnerships, build the curriculum, prepare technology, and train staff
- **Phase 3** - Recruitment: market to target population and finalize program details
- **Phase 4** - Launch: begin operation of the program
(See Appendix A for complete timeframe.)

**Measurement Plan**
The measurement plan is defined by the evaluation plan, which includes metrics on outcomes and objectives. As part of an accredited program through the host institution, ongoing assessment and evaluation will be core to the academy’s function. This model must stand up to the scrutiny of the future prospective university and industry partners as it seeks to expand the academy.

**Timeline**
The WIL Academy model will have 1.5 years after launch to refine its model. Dependent on the success of the model, WIL leadership and its advisory board will explore long-term feasibility for broader expansion. Plans for additional locations will be developed through a franchise model. A second WIL Academy would be launched in a new location by year three. Additional franchise sites would be planted every two years after that based on the success of the model, identified need, available funding, and interested partners.

**Major Dependencies, Constraints and Mitigations**
The project requires knowledgeable and contributing partners. Selection, engagement and commitment of partners and students are essential. Employer partners and the host institution must be willing to contribute time and resources and must commit for a specified length of time. An advisory board will facilitate connections to prospective partners, help secure foundation funding, inform curriculum development and model, and mitigate risk through board members’ academic and industry expertise.

**Assumptions**
Viability of the project is contingent on strategic local partnerships with employers and a host institution. The goal is to target a specific market: career-interrupted students in regions with identified gaps between employer needs and academic preparation. Thorough analyses must be conducted to select an appropriate initial location that will fulfill all components of the model. All of these factors are critical for success.

**Resources**

**Budget**
WIL Academy will operate with $1,000,000 in year one and approximately $2,000,000 through year three. The budget is divided by pre-launch (year 1-1.5) and launch (year 1.5-3). Income will initially come from foundation grants. Following the launch with 100 students, income from tuition will be generated.
Costs include personnel, marketing, supplies, licensing, and technology. WIL Academy will operate with a lean staff and lack of overhead, as the host university will provide facilities, administrative costs, infrastructure and other operational costs. In return, the host institution will receive 50% of student tuition ($1,500 per student).

Industry partners will contribute staff and resources for curriculum development and workplace management. Industry partners will pay 25% of student tuition ($750 per student per year) for the work students perform in the workplace. (See Appendix B for full budget.)

**Staffing**
WIL Academy will operate with a very lean staff, due to its partnerships with the host university and industry partners. The leadership team will consist of a president/CEO and three vice presidents (finance and operations, academics and student success, and industry partnerships). A limited number of faculty and student success coaches will make up the work-integrated learning team. (See Appendix C for organization chart.)

**Evaluation Plan**
The success of the WIL Academy program will be evaluated on six key components: 1.) Quality of program, which focuses on curriculum and learning outcomes and includes student and employer satisfaction metrics; 2.) completion rate; 3.) graduate employment rate; 4.) skills development for local industry; 5.) quality/value of WIL model, and 6.) franchise progress. Components are mapped to metrics, measurement method and target outcomes. (See Appendix D for the full evaluation plan.)
REFERENCES


Appendix A: Timeframe for WIL Academy Planning and Launch

Pre-Launch: Phases 1-3:

**Phase 1: Conceptual Planning** (Jan – Sept): This first phase entails identifying an initial location and developing options for a host institution. Research will focus on high-demand careers for the given location and mutual benefits for the host institution. We will organize a team of informal advisors to guide the process, provide critical feedback, and connect us to key foundations, institutions and employers. This phase will include identifying prospective local and national foundations with which to partner on this venture.

Once location, host institution, and funding have been established, we will proceed to hire a core leadership team to begin the tactical planning and preparation for implementation. This team will develop the detailed business model and workplan for implementation.

**Phase 2: Implementation** (Sept – May): During the implementation phase, the leadership will build out the rest of the team. With a full-team on board, we will engage in the work of establishing plans and completing MOUs with our host institution. Our business development staff will establish partnerships with businesses for the workplace training.

Staff will use this period to develop the curriculum in conjunction with business partners. The curriculum will be guided by a competency-based approach, relying on the use of e-portfolios and structured around open educational resources. The team will refine the model of integration between workplace learning and the classroom. In collaboration with the host institutions, we will work through the necessary channels to gain approval on all forms of assessment and evaluation of the program.

In addition to the curriculum, staff will create a model of wrap-around student supports and will create and finalize marketing materials. We will get supplies, equipment, facilities, and technology in place.

**Phase 3: Recruitment** (May-Aug): Marketing will be in full swing by the beginning of the recruitment phase in order to build our first student cohort. During this phase, we will make any additional hires and provide for final training as needed. Final prep work on the program model, curriculum, employer partnerships, and last details will be handled.

**Phase 4: Launch** (Aug): The program will officially launch in August with an intensive time of prior learning assessment, soft-skill development and college-readiness preparation to ensure students have a strong start for classes in September.
## Appendix B: Year 1-3 Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Launch: Year 1</th>
<th>Pre-Launch: Year 2 (first 6 months)/Launch: (2nd 6 months)</th>
<th>Launch: Year 3</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>LAUNCH FUNDS</strong></td>
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<td>Foundation grant</td>
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<td><strong>REVENUE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>50% of student tuition</td>
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<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
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<td><strong>COSTS</strong></td>
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<td>Leadership team and admin</td>
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<td>Faculty and advisors (5)</td>
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<td>Student coaches (5)</td>
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<td>Marketing</td>
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<td>Infrastructure - licensing and technology</td>
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<td>Supplies</td>
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<td>Travel and start-up expenses</td>
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<td>miscellaneous</td>
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<td><strong>Total Costs</strong></td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
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</table>
Appendix C: Staffing Model for WIL Academy

- President/CEO
  - VP of Finance and Operations
  - VP of Academics and Student Success
  - VP of Industry Partnerships
  - Administrative Assistant
  - Faculty
  - Student Success coaches
# Appendix D: Evaluation Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Measurement / data collection method</th>
<th>Target Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of program (curriculum, support model, technology)</td>
<td>Degree of student satisfaction with the program</td>
<td>Student and graduate surveys &amp; other feedback mechanisms</td>
<td>90% student satisfaction rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of program</td>
<td>Degree of employer satisfaction with program and learning outcomes</td>
<td>Employer interviews &amp; and other feedback mechanisms</td>
<td>90% employer satisfaction rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completion rate</td>
<td>% of students completing program</td>
<td>Graduation data</td>
<td>70% degree completion rate for first cohort</td>
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<td>Graduate employment rate</td>
<td>% of students getting jobs and being retained after one year</td>
<td>Alumni surveys &amp; employer feedback</td>
<td>75% employment rate for first cohort of grads; Employment continuation rate of one year minimum</td>
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<td>Skills development for local industries</td>
<td>Changes in local skills gaps and unfilled jobs</td>
<td>Local employment data</td>
<td>As per local requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and value of WIL Academy model</td>
<td>Degree of franchisee satisfaction with model and support</td>
<td>Feedback from franchisee and other stakeholders</td>
<td>90% franchise satisfaction rate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Franchise</td>
<td># of students in program, grad rate, quality of employer engagement, increase in host institutions / franchisees over time</td>
<td>Data and feedback from franchisees</td>
<td>As per 3 year business plan</td>
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</tbody>
</table>